

Overt Victimization and the Psychosocial Maladjustment of Adolescents in Secondary Schools, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Overt victimization and maladjustment is a drawback that is affecting most adolescents in Secondary schools in Cameroon for the past years which has been grossly neglected in Sub Sahara Africa. This study was on how overt victimization leads to psychosocial maladjustments among adolescents in secondary schools in Cameroon (North West, South West, Central, and Adamawa). The research method adopted for this study was mixed method with a concurrent nested design. The sample was made up of 594 students from twelve schools, 24 administrators from these schools and twelve focus groups from twelve schools. The instruments used in collecting data were a questionnaire and focus group discussion with students, and an interview for school administrators. Data obtained were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using cross tabulations, frequencies, percentages and multiple response sets. Findings showed that overt victimization significantly predicts psychosocial maladjustment of adolescents in secondary schools ($P < 0.001$). The positive sign of the correlation value ($R = 0.347^{**}$) implied that adolescents are more likely to suffer from psychosocial maladjustments when there is constant or persistent occurrence of overt victimization in the school environment. It was concluded that overt victimization leads to psychosocial maladjustments among adolescents in secondary schools in Cameroon. Based on the findings, it was recommended that curbing overt victimisation and fostering adolescents adjustment in school is a joint effort by parents, teachers, school Chaplains, administrators, discipline masters, mistresses and school counsellors through advocacy and organizing seminars which create awareness on deteriorating effects of over victimization.

KEYWORDS: Overt victimization, psychosocial maladjustment, adolescents

INTRODUCTION

During adolescence, development of close friendships and peer relations are of paramount importance. Paterson (1995) posited that friends are important and provide a social support and are also influential in a number of areas in this developmental stage of adolescents such as their self-esteem and identity (Harter et al., 1996). As the concept suggest, this type of victimization involves outward or open confrontation, acts of aggression such as physical fighting, verbal threats, and bullying (Deborah et al., 2016).

During the storm and stress period as denoted by the father of adolescents Granville Stanley (1904), adolescents go through various forms of problems, disfunctioning and conflicts which ultimately impair normal psychosocial developments and aggravate psychosocial maladjustments. Psychosocial maladjustments are the state of emotional and behavioural disorders which are either internalized or externalized conditions respectively. Most common psychosocial maladjustments among adolescents will include depression, anxiety, fear, low self-esteem,

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delinquency, aggression, and educational difficulties (Ahamd et al., 2007).

Psychosocial maladjustment in the school environment is a situation where students have difficulties in meeting up with their expectations of the school context. This difficulty is expressed through behaviours that can prevent a child from adapting to the school environment successfully. This will include aggressive behaviour, oppositional defiance, low academic performance, low social contact (Darney et al., 2013; Kellam et al 2014; Margetts, 2005). School maladjustment is therefore inevitable in adolescent's psychosocial maladjustments. School maladjustment is a strong predictor of negative outcomes in secondary school, such as requiring specialized school services, entering peer groups and with anti social behaviours which display a huge and high behavioural risk (Reinke et al., 2008). This has been linked to violent experience at school either as victims an aggressor, or an active observer (Rojas & Leiva 2015).

According to Pepler and Craig (2000) overt victimization is a common experience among school children with 10 to 15 per cent of children experiencing it. Kochenderfer (1996) posited that between 40% and 80% of school-aged youth have experienced peer victimization while Juvonen and Graham, 2006, argued that it is between 10%-15% of youth who are victimized chronically. Victimization has become rampant in secondary schools around the world. It is observed across race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Overt victimization is prevalent in virtually all grades and all schools in Cameroon- and can be mild, moderate, or even severe (Smith et al., 2007). Bullying in most school settings in Cameroon is socially or culturally ingrained from other bullies. When any student is bullied, most of them intend to bully other young ones in later years, making the chain difficult to end. Moreover, rates of victimization at secondary schools resulting from physical fights, bullying, gossiping and theft are the most alarming (Astor et al., 1999; Van Dorn, 2004; Ladd, 1996).

Overt victimization can be directly manifested through hitting, kicking, biting, yelling, punching and pushing (Juvonen & Graham, 2001). Overt victimization involves bringing harm to another through a number of physical acts for example punching, hitting, scratching, and pinching. Kochenderfer argued that during early adolescence, victimization will be related to the timing of puberty. Furthermore, as compared with same-sex victimization, cross-sex victimization will also increase with age. Another vital aspect worth

mentioning in this research on violence and school victimization is the gender of adolescents. Scientific literature shows that boys are more overtly violent and suffer more overt victimization at school than girls (Card et al., 2008). As seen from above, we understand that due to the consequences of overt victimization, adolescents might suffer psychosocial maladjustment especially in the school environment such as isolation, distress, low self-esteem, depression, fear and low academic performances.

Overt victimization during early adolescence is a very common and rampant occurrence. The overt part of it is very common with male adolescents than the female (Card et al., 2008). A lot of adolescents face a number of trials and tribulations in today's society. In relation to these challenges encountered, the overt is on the rise (Olweus, 1994). Despite its occurrence mostly with the male gender, it's a rampant occurrence during the adolescent stage and it's inevitable in the school environment. Overt victimization involves bringing harm to another through a number of physical acts, for example, punching, hitting, scratching, and pinching. Crick et al (1997), in the same line posited that overt victimization is aggression that is intended to harm others physically through pushing, kicking, biting, using weapons, hitting, punching, shoving, or mentally through physical threats. During early adolescence victimization is related to the timing of puberty. Juvonen et al (2003) reported that up to a staggering 75% of youths suffer from overt victimization and physical aggressors or both in any given year.

Overt victimization amongst adolescents may be an obstacle to them and also a difficult task for them to disclose. It is considered as a unique stressor in that it may be viewed as potentially detrimental to tell others about victimization due to fear of being further victimized, shamed or embarrassed (Thoits, 1986). With the above consideration, peer victimization among adolescents will be seen as domestic violence in which individuals have been found to hesitate to seek support due to shame and embarrassment about the situation they are going through (Levendosky et al., 2004) or because they believe authorities will not be able to help them (Wolf et al., 2003). Worth mentioning is the fact that individuals experiencing stress may have difficulty with close relationships, which may make it difficult to seek support (Coyne & DeLongis, 1986).

Garcia-Moreno (2002); Tjaden and Thoennes (2000), posited that risk factors for perpetration of victimization include; low self esteem, low income, low academic achievements, young age, involvement

in aggressive or delinquent behaviour as youths, heavy alcohol or drug use, anger and hostilities, personality disorders, prior history of being physically abused, having few friends and being physically isolated from others, unemployment's, economic stress, emotional dependence and insecurity, belief in strict gender roles, desire for power and control in relationship, history of experience of poor parenting as a child, and being a victim of physical and psychological abuse.

Other individuals may suffer more negative psychosocial consequences after experiencing victimization than others. Considering that peer victimization at schools is a worldwide developmental issue faced by adolescence, (Swearer & Hymel, 2015; Undheim & Sund, 2010) its consequences cannot be underestimated. Approximately 15% of adolescents in the world have experience overt victimization in particular which resulted to deleterious outcomes including: significant academic difficulties and psychosocial difficulties. This also included depression, anxiety, loneliness, fear, academic drop out, isolation (Rueger & Jenkins, 2014). Ma and Bellmore (2016) and Miller et al., (2013), posited that helping adolescent's victims to better cope with victimization as a whole is of increasing importance to schools worldwide as a

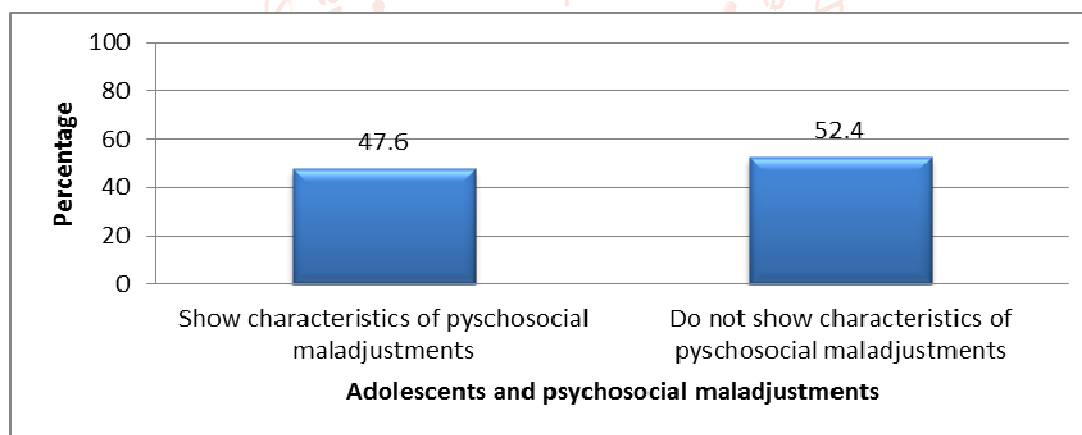
prevention and protection program. Kochedefer et al., hold that it is documented that adolescents use a variety of coping strategies in respond to the various types of victimization and their consequences.

Methods

The research method adopted for this study was mixed method with a concurrent nested design. The target population was made up of all the 72,347 teachers and 1,869,039 students from all the ten regions of Cameroon. The sample size for this study was made up of 586 students. Purposive sampling technique was used to select administrators, counsellors and students who were victims of victimization. Questionnaire, interview guide and focus group discussion were instruments used for data collection. The quantitative data were analyzed using the descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The descriptive statistical tools included: frequency count, percentages and multiple responses set which aimed at calculating the summary of findings. To test the hypothesis of the study, the Spearman rho test was used because the data for the variable was not normally distributed based on the statistics of the test of normality assumption. The qualitative data derived from open ended questions were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach with the aid of themes, groundings/frequency and quotations.

Findings

Psychosocial maladjustment among adolescent students in secondary



In aggregate, findings showed that 47.6% of the adolescent students showed signs of psychosocial maladjustment while 52.4% of them did not.

Table 1: Comparing psychosocial maladjustment among adolescent students in secondary schools by demographic data

Demographic data			Show characteristics of psychosocial maladjustment		Total	Chi-square test
			Strongly Agree/Agree	Disagree/Strongly Disagree		
School type	Government	n	174	180	354	$\chi^2=7.64$ df=2 P=0.021
		%	49.2%	50.8%		
	Confessional	n	34	23	57	
		%	59.5%	40.5%		
	Lay Private	n	64	97	161	
		%	39.9%	60.1%		

Class	Form one	n	63	72	135	$\chi^2=3.93$ df=3 P=0.268
		%	46.4%	53.6%		
	Form two	n	88	76	164	
		%	53.7%	46.3%		
	Form three	n	116	145	261	
		%	44.6%	55.4%		
	Form four	n	6	7	13	
		%	42.3%	57.7%		
Age range	9-11	n	62	75	137	$\chi^2=2.91$ df=2 P=0.233
		%	45.1%	54.9%		
	12-14	n	170	168	338	
		%	50.3%	49.7%		
	15-17	n	41	57	98	
		%	41.7%	58.3%		
Location	Rural	n	89	95	184	$\chi^2=0.06$ df=1 P=0.811
		%	48.2%	51.8%		
	Urban	n	184	205	389	
		%	47.3%	52.7%		
Parental marital status	Married	n	200	229	429	$\chi^2=1.73$ df=3 P=0.631
		%	46.6%	53.4%		
	Single	n	53	51	104	
		%	50.5%	49.5%		
	Divorced	n	9	6	15	
		%	62.4%	37.6%		
	Separated	n	11	15	26	
		%	43.4%	56.6%		

Comparing psychosocial maladjustment among the adolescent students in secondary schools by demographic data, findings show that by school type, a majority of adolescent students from Confessional schools (59.5%) display characteristics of psychosocial maladjustment, followed by those from Government schools (49.2%) and lastly, those from Lay Private schools (39.9%). Findings also showed that by class, more of adolescents students in form two (53.7%) display characteristics of psychosocial maladjustment followed by those in form one (46.4%), form three (44.6%) and lastly form four (42.3%).

By age range, findings show that adolescent students within the age range of 12-14 (50.3%) display characteristics of psychosocial maladjustments more followed by those within the age range of 9-11 (45.1%) and lastly, those within the age range of 15-17 (41.7%). By school location, adolescents in rural (48.2%) and urban (47.3%) secondary schools display characteristics of psychosocial maladjustments almost at the same rate. Finally, based on parents' marital status, a majority of adolescent students from divorced parents (62.4%) (Broken homes) display characteristics of psychosocial maladjustment, followed by those from single parents (50.5%) and lastly, those from married parents (46.6%).

Table 2: Adolescent students characterisation of overt victimisation

Items	Stretched				Collapsed	
	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD
I experience unjust hitting in school from my friends	111 (19.3%)	145 (25.2%)	160 (27.8%)	160 (27.8%)	256 (44.4%)	320 (55.6%)
I am being yelled by my peers in school	148 (25.8%)	149 (26.0%)	153 (26.7%)	124 (21.6%)	297 (51.7%)	277 (48.3%)
I punch my peers and school mates in school for unjust reasons	47 (8.2%)	81 (14.1%)	191 (33.2%)	257 (44.6%)	128 (22.2%)	448 (77.8%)
I am being beaten by my peers in school	60 (10.4%)	84 (14.6%)	156 (27.1%)	276 (47.9%)	144 (25.0%)	432 (75.0%)

Students are wounded in school	139 (24.2%)	187 (32.5%)	130 (22.6%)	119 (20.7%)	326 (56.7%)	249 (43.3%)
I face a lot of hostilities in school	87 (15.2%)	150 (26.2%)	157 (27.4%)	178 (31.1%)	237 (41.4%)	335 (58.6%)
My peers and I come to school with weapons	59 (10.4%)	68 (11.9%)	108 (18.9%)	335 (58.8%)	127 (22.3%)	443 (77.7%)
There are frequent fights in school by peers	149 (26.1%)	198 (34.7%)	78 (13.7%)	146 (25.6%)	347 (60.8%)	224 (39.2%)
Brutalization by throwing objects at peers is a rampant occurrence in school	169 (29.7%)	139 (24.4%)	124 (21.8%)	138 (24.2%)	308 (54.0%)	262 (46.0%)
There is a lot of hostility from peers especially during break	130 (22.9%)	214 (37.7%)	123 (21.7%)	100 (17.6%)	344 (60.7%)	223 (39.3%)
Multiple Response Set (MRS)	1099 (19.2%)	1415 (24.7%)	1380 (24.1%)	1833 (32.0%)	2514 (43.9%)	3213 (56.1%)

In overall, the findings showed that almost half 43.9% of the adolescent students indicated that there is overt violence in their school with some of them being victims and accomplices while a majority of 56.1% denied. These overall findings are equally presented on the figure 9 below.

Table 3: Comparing overt victimization by demographic data

Demographic data			Overt victimization		Total	Chi-square test
			Strongly Agree/Agree	Disagree Strongly Disagree		
School type	Government	n	167	186	353	$\chi^2=19.41$ df=2 P=0.000
		%	47.4%	52.6%		
	Confessional	n	34	23	57	
		%	60.1%	39.9%		
	Lay Private	n	50	112	162	
		%	30.6%	69.4%		
Class	Form one	n	50	86	136	$\chi^2=19.27$ df=3 P=0.000
		%	36.5%	63.5%		
	Form two	n	95	69	164	
		%	57.7%	42.3%		
	Form three	n	103	157	260	
		%	39.5%	60.5%		
	Form four	n	4	9	13	
		%	33.8%	66.2%		
Age range	9-11	n	56	82	138	$\chi^2=2.31$ df=2 P=0.315
		%	40.8%	59.2%		
	12-14	n	157	179	336	
		%	46.6%	53.4%		
	15-17	n	39	60	99	
		%	39.0%	61.0%		
Location	Rural	n	80	104	184	$\chi^2=0.00$ df=1 P=0.989
		%	43.8%	56.2%		
	Urban	n	171	218	389	
		%	44.0%	56.0%		
Parental marital status	Married	n	188	238	427	$\chi^2=1.61$ df=3 P=0.658
		%	44.2%	55.8%		
	Single	n	42	63	104	
		%	39.8%	60.2%		
	Divorced	n	8	7	15	
		%	51.0%	49.0%		
	Separated	n	13	13	26	
		%	51.2%	48.8%		

Comparing overt victimization among the adolescent students in secondary schools by demographic data, findings show that by school type, a majority of adolescent students from Confessional schools (60.1%) attested that it occurs in their school followed by those from Government schools (47.4%) and lastly, those from Lay Private schools (30.6%). By class, more of adolescent students in form two (57.7%) attested to over victimization followed by those in form three (39.5%), form one (36.5%) and lastly form four (33.8%).

By age range, findings showed that adolescent students within the age range of 12-14 (46.6%) attested to over victimization more followed by those within the age range of 9-11 (40.8%) and lastly, those within the age range of 15-17 (39.0%). By school location, adolescent students in rural (43.8%) and urban (44.0%) attested to over victimization almost the same. Finally, based on parents' marital status, a majority of the adolescents from divorced parents (51.0%) (Broken homes) and separated parents (51.2%) attested to over victimization that their counterpart.

Table 4: Cross tabulation between overt victimization and psychosocial maladjustment

			Overt victimization		Total
			Strongly Agree/Agree	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	
Psychosocial maladjustment	Strongly Agree/Agree	N	143	118	261
		%	54.8%	45.2%	
	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	N	138	169	307
		%	45.0%	55.0%	
Total		N	281	287	568

Using a cross tabulation technique, findings show that adolescent students whose school environment is characterized with over victimization suffer more from psychosocial maladjustment (54.8%) than adolescent students whose school environment is not characterized of overt victimization (45.0%).

Table 5: Thematic characterisation of overt victimization

Students understanding of overt victimization	How often the students experience overt victimization	Causes of overt victimization	How to eradicate overt victimization
Act of aggression	'Often'	'Jealousy'	'Reinforcement of school discipline'
Tarnishing of one's image	'Always'	'Anger'	Counseling'
Brutalization	'Rarely'	'Greed'	'Parental control'
		'Peer pressure'	
		'Social media influence'	
		'Fighting for boy or girl friend'	

The findings of focus group discussion carried out with some students show on table 16 that some of the adolescent student's defined overt victimization as an act of aggression to a person that may cause damage in the person's life such as rape. Others defined overt victimization as the act of tarnishing some bodies image aggressively or by down looking the person. Finally some of the students defined overt victimization as the act of hitting, beating and slapping.

Table 6: Testing the effect of overt victimisation on psychosocial maladjustment of adolescent students

Test	Statistics	Overt victimization	Psychosocial maladjustment
Spearman's rho	R-value	1.000	.347**
	P-value	.	.000
	N	568	568

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Statistically, findings showed that overt victimization significantly predicts the psychosocial maladjustment of adolescent students in secondary schools. The positive sign of the correlation implied that adolescent students were more likely to suffer psychosocial maladjustment when there was persistent occurrence of overt victimization in the school environment. To add to this, descriptive findings revealed that adolescent students whose school environment was characterized by overt victimization suffered more psychosocial maladjustment (54.8%) than those whose school environment was not characterized by overt victimization (45.0%).

Discussion

The findings showed that overt victimization significantly led to psychosocial maladjustment in secondary schools in Cameroon. This implied that adolescent students who are in environments characterized by overt victimization suffer more psychosocial maladjustments than those whose environments are free from it. This finding is in line with Rueger and Jenkins (2014) who opined that adolescents globally experience overt victimization which results to deleterious outcomes including significant academic difficulties as well as psychosocial difficulties such as depression, loneliness, fear, academic drop out and isolation. The findings indicated that students who find themselves in environments characterized by physical victimization such as: hitting, bullying, yelling, punching, and other sorts of hostilities, are very uncomfortable due to the outcome. This also confirms findings of Deborah et al (2016) who revealed that physical victimization involves physical fights, bullying and beatings and its outcome includes depression, stagnation, drop in academics' and isolation.

Findings equally showed that students were frequently wounded; some confirmed that they were yield at by peers in school. Others attested to the fact that they were hit by peers, brutalized and had frequent fights with their peers. This view is in congruence with Juvonen & Graham (2001) as they argued that overt victimization is manifested through hitting, kicking, yelling, punching, fighting and pushing among adolescent students.

With respect to demographic data revealed that, findings revealed that those with lower age range portrayed more characteristics of overt victimization than those adolescents who are older. This is in line with kochedefer (1996) who posited that overt victimization decreases with age. Those of the lower classes (form two) are more involved with overt victimization than those in the higher classes (form three and four). From my observation this is true in that the higher the students' progress, the lesser they become involved in physical victimization in the school environment.

Students indicated that some causes of victimization were jealousy, anger, greed, ignorance, peer pressure, influence from social media, fighting over boy and girl friends etc. While the teachers posited that some of the causes they observed are due to mixed culture, jealousy, different backgrounds. The findings from both the teachers and students were contrary with Crandall et al., 2004 and Heise and Mereno, 2002 who found out that victimization is as a result of age,

prior history, being a female, being less educated, unemployment, heavy consumption of alcohol and poverty which leads to overcrowding.

Conclusion

The findings show that overt victimization leads to psychosocial maladjustment. Overt victimization significantly predicts the psychosocial maladjustment of adolescent students in secondary schools. This means that adolescent students were more likely to suffer psychosocial maladjustment when there was persistent occurrence of overt victimization in the school environment. To add to this, descriptive findings revealed that adolescent students whose school environment was characterized by overt victimization suffered more psychosocial maladjustment (54.8%) than those whose school environment was not characterized by overt victimization (45.0%). This is in line with Undheim and Sund (2010) the support that overt victimization leads to psychosocial maladjustment, considering that peer victimization at schools is a worldwide developmental issue faced by adolescence, its consequences cannot be underestimated. Approximately 15% of adolescents in the world have experience overt victimization in particular which resulted to deleterious outcomes including significant academic difficulties and psychosocial difficulties including depression, anxiety, loneliness, fear, academic drop out, isolation (Rueger& Jenkins, 2014). The findings of this work, is in conformity with the recent happenings of the present day.

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